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JAMES BARR AMES

JAMES BARR AMES had a strong natural taste for teaching. During his last year in the Law School, 1871-72, he was tutor in French in Harvard College, and from that year to his death he never ceased to teach. In 1872-73 he was Instructor in History in the College. His whole career was at Harvard University. He received the Bachelor's degree in 1868, and the Master's degree and the degree of Bachelor of Laws in 1872, all three from Harvard, and he never taught except in Harvard University. He prepared case-books and wrote occasional articles and addresses on legal subjects; but he never gave systematic instruction anywhere but in Harvard University, and he never took a whole year of vacation in his life. He contented himself with the regular vacations of each academic year, and much of those vacations he gave to work incidental to teaching.

A year after his graduation from the Law School he was made Assistant Professor of Law, having proved his quality as a teacher by two years of service in Harvard College. His appointment as Assistant Professor was a remarkable step for the Law School and the University to take. Up to that time the University had never appointed as teacher of law a man who had not been in practice. His appointment was strongly urged by Dean Langdell on the ground that Ames had a remarkable legal mind, and was an extraordinarily successful teacher; and the Corporation and Overseers decided to take the risk for five years on Professor Langdell's and the President's testimony. The consent of the Board of Overseers could not have been obtained, if an assistant professorship had not been an office terminable in five years. The strong interest of Professor Langdell in the appointment was due to the fact that Ames had been his best pupil while he

was introducing his case system of instruction into the Law School. It soon appeared that Ames's mental gifts made him a remarkably successful teacher under the case method, which was then beginning to demonstrate its power of training young men for the best work in the legal profession. So striking was Ames's success in making the students think for themselves, and get a mastery of the new method, that Ames was promoted to be full professor one year before the end of his five years' term as assistant professor, with the cordial approval of students, professors, and governing boards.

His success as a teacher depended largely on his capacity for sympathetic appreciation of the student's frame of mind, but also on his gift for stating both sides of a legal question with perfect clearness and without indicating his own opinion. He stimulated every student to draw his own conclusions from given premises. He had himself an extraordinary memory for the facts of a case, or of a multitude of cases, and for the sources and historical development of legal principles, and he wanted his students to remember the facts of every case they studied, and to observe the development of the principles involved; but his primary object was always to make them think for themselves. The case method as he applied it taught every competent student how to use the voluminous records of legal proceedings, old and new, so as to find safe precedents, how to apply established principles to new cases, and how to bring out the weighty considerations in any case. In short, his students learned to draw sound briefs. This was a very interesting, stimulating, and effective method, and Ames followed it in the Law School with increasing success for thirty-six years. To him is largely due the success of the Langdellian method, and no one was clearer in the recognition of that fact than Professor Langdell, whose own teaching power was diminished by his very defective eyesight and a certain constitutional slowness in making a careful statement.

Ames was first appointed full Professor in 1877, at a time when no endowed and named professorship was vacant. Two years later he was transferred to the Bussey professorship, and in 1903 he became Dane Professor of Law, thus arriving finally at a famous professorship which had been held in succession by Joseph Story, Simon Greenleaf, Theophilus Parsons, and Christopher Columbus Langdell. Among the professors of Harvard University there is a distinct preference for an endowed and named professorship, for the reason that

an endowed and named professorship connects the new incumbent with the series of eminent men who have already held it. To succeed Professor Langdell in the Dane professorship was a distinct pleasure and satisfaction to Ames.

On the retirement of Professor Langdell from the deanship in 1895, Ames was made Dean of the Law School, and thereupon became in every sense the leader and head of the School. As an administrator he was firm, kindly, and extraordinarily generous in putting his time and his alert attention at the disposition of every student who desired to consult him. He permitted himself to be interrupted in his own work at any time of the day or evening by any student or any colleague; and his generosity in this respect was very freely availed of by both students and teachers. It was a good deal easier to ask the Dean where such a case could be found, or in what decision such a principle had been laid down, than it was to look up the matter for one's self; and the Dean's memory was astonishingly comprehensive, sure, and ready. His labors, both as professor and as administrator, were very much increased by this habit of holding himself at the disposition of any student or any teacher at any time. He passed most of his time in the School building, and was always accessible.

Ames's influence as a professor and as Dean was much increased by another of his moral attributes — he was always gentle of speech, quiet in manner, attentive to the person who was addressing him, and fully alive to the honorable requirements of the situation. Under all circumstances he was a gentleman, and a man of good will. His standards of conduct were the highest, both for himself and for the profession of teaching. No merely intellectual powers could compensate in his judgment for the lack in a teacher of a strong sense of duty and honor.

As a student of law Ames was chiefly interested in the common law; yet when it devolved largely on him, in succession to Professor Langdell, to supervise the increase of the Law Library, it appeared year after year that the Roman law was receiving its full share of attention. As a scholar his philosophic mind ranged willingly over all the fields of law; but as a teacher in the Harvard Law School he dealt almost exclusively with court-made common law. He was a wide reader in the field of legal history, and would gladly have devoted much time to that great subject; but that satisfaction was denied him — he never had time for it.

Ames's life was a happy and fortunate one; for he had domestic happiness, much pleasure in bodily exercise and out-of-door life, long years of devoted service to an institution and a cause he loved, and heartfelt satisfaction in a career which mounted in interest and value as life went on, and was best at its close.

Charles W. Eliot.

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By Pach

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James Barr Ames